PROPHETS AND PEACE
ISAIAH 55: 1-13
LUKE 19: 41-44

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At this hour at the National Cathedral, Washington, D. C., the leaders of many of the major religious bodies of our nation along with members of Congress and Governmental officials are engaging in an ecumenical worship service devoted to the theme of peace. Along with every other Presbyterian pastor in the nation I received notice last week of this special event, and a request to turn my attention, sermonically this Sunday, to the topic of peace.

I have not really done this in the past - for a number of reasons, some of which may be simple rationalizations: private excuses for avoiding confronting an issue over which men of good will disagree, and about which my own feelings are very mixed. Let us, this morning, think together about peace in the context of our Christian faith, our belonging to the church and our sense of the Church's mission in the world. Let us confess, at the outset, that we have more by way of emotions than specific solutions. As I begin, I do so knowing that I will say more than some of you would have me say: and less than some of you would have me say. But I confess that in spite of that I feel compelled to share with you where I am, and where I feel our common faith in Almighty God would place all of us.

First, the groundwork. "Basic to any Christian commitment is the realization that it's going to cost something: that it will call into question every other commitment: that there will be considerable personal pain and sacrifice at the point of ranking one's priorities." That is where we begin: with the honest recognition that commitment to Jesus Christ is our first commitment - or it is no commitment at all: that it judges all our other commitments and loyalties, and not vice versa. And if you cannot say that about your own personal commitment, I warn you that very little of what I say this morning will make sense. That's the groundwork.

The framework is in the role of the church in the world. Historically and traditionally it can be described in terms of two words: Priestly and Prophetic. The priestly role of the church is its attention to the stuff of institutional religion: its ceremonial functions: its formal role in performing those rituals and rites that express the theological convictions of the people: marriage, funerals, prayer, worship - the sacra-

acts of imparting to the world the reality of God. The priestly role of the clergyman has to do with his officiating at worship, celebrating the sacraments and rites of the Church, counseling his people, teaching and preserving doctrine, and administering the institution.

The Prophetic role of the Church, on the other hand, is to announce to the world the Word of God.: to bring what we know of God's will for his people and his creation into confrontation with the secular structures of society. That too is part of the clergyman's job, but more importantly it is the job of the church, the whole people, clergy and lay alike. We sense ourselves called to be the vehicle - the herald - the means by which the World of God gets conveyed to all men.

Both priestly and prophetic functions are Old Testament concepts, represented in the history of Israel by two distinct types of persons - two distinct religious personalities. In ancient Israel the priest, as the name implies, was an organization man - the prophet, a rebel: the priest was an insider, protected and surrounded by hoary tradition, elaborate ritual and an abiding concern for religious law - the prophet, more often than not, was an outsider, although not by choice, standing quite apart from the ordinary religious structures: the priest dealt with the faithful - the prophet addressed himself to the world: theologically the priest stood for the God of Israel - the prophet for one, universal God who was Lord of all men.

Both personalities were necessary to the vitality of Israel: the priests preserved the tradition: the prophets were out on the cutting edge. Both personalities merge in the Old Testament into one - and that one image - priest and prophet - becomes the model for God's people as they live in the world.

Thus, the Church of Jesus Christ, has always seen itself in both of these roles; but - as was always the case in the Old Testament - the prophetic role has caused trouble. The groundwork is the sense that commitment to Jesus Christ will cost something - because where we begin to think prophetically we discover that our priorities must be reordered - and we begin to feel pain.

Nobody wants to be a prophet: Jeremiah tried every trick in the book to wriggle from under God's call to be his spokesman. Nobody likes a prophet because the very

nature of the job is to be upsetting and discomforting, to be judgemental and angry and honest. And so the Church - and I'm talking now about you and me - has always been inclined to be more priestly than prophetic: to be concerned about institutional matters and to forget about the world. And I confess that I'd like that very much: it would be most comfortable: it is, in our culture, a very popular stance. Billy Graham preach: regularly in the White House because he is a priest and not a prophet. And the President's Sunday morning services are a contemporary instant replay of a very familar historical scenario: the King in his chambers taking comfort in the oily words of his personal chaplain - while the prophet is banished outside the City walls. Prophets have never been very popular with the halls of government. And churches, when they are prophetic, are not likely to be popular either.

Traditionally, the prophet has held out for the universality of God, and has been unalterably opposed to the suggestion that God belongs to one nation, one class or race. Traditionally, the prophet has held out for the social expression of religion, for the translation of doctrine into action. Traditionally, the prophet has held out for the dream - the vision: essentially the prophet is the real optimist, the one who lives and dies for the concept that men can do better tomorrow: that men can be more than they are.

I read this morning from the book fo the prophet Isaiah; a chapter that is a prototype of prophetic thinking. It includes the proclaimation that God is doing a new thing in the world: he is bringing a ragged band of Jews out of exile and back to their native land: it includes the invitation to personal faith and joy, and then it holds un the vision the great day of peace when even the mountains and hills will break out ' singing.

That is still the prophetic role of the church: to speak for God - to call the world to repentence - and to hold up the vision of a better tomorrow. And yet when it does it: when it honestly tries to convey God's will to the world, people who ought to know better act as if it is doing something alien and strange: people say "stick to religion", and what that means is "stick to priestly religion' and forget about being prophetic. But that cannot be done, if we are to continue to call ourselves God's people.

In the most recent issue of Presbyterian Life, J. Irwin Miller, head of Cummins

Engine Co., in Columbus, Indiana, has written an excellent article, "Should Churches 'Play it Safe'?" Now, Mr. Irwin is certainly no Marxist: he is no naive leftist. He isn't naive at all. He is an honest Christian who was a member of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches. His article, - and please read it - was published in Reader's Digest in response to a series of articles in that journal that were highly critical of the World Council. The issue which those articles did not confront, and which Mr. Milles does, is the prophetic stance of any church that wants to call itself Christian. Listen to how he puts it:

"The role of prophet is active, often disruptive...and it is thoroughly unpleasant to those on the receiving end of the preaching. I know this, because, if the church today were to do its job fully, I would be among those called to repent."....."Whose job is it to cause society to 'repent' if not the Church's? The church dare not evade its obligations to proclaim God's judgement over all human activity, even as it proclaims his mercy and forgiveness" (P.L. May 1972, P.48)

The difficulty, of course, is that human problems, social problems - are political problems: and we do differ over their solution. And here, I believe, the prophet - and the prophetic church - must proceed with caution. It used to be said that the Presbyterian Church was just the "Republican Party at Prayer." And today there are many who feel that the national officers of the Presbyterian Church represent the voice of the Democratic party's left wing - rather than Almighty God. And if either is true, we are as unfaithful as the German church in the 1930's - that allowed itself to become the ecclesiastical voice of National Socialism. The prophetic church must take seriously the body politic, for that is when the decisions are made. But the moment the prophet's commitments are to a party - or a nation - or a system - he has stopped being a prophet of God.

Locally - every congregation of Christian people has a prophetic ministry to the world and its own communtiy. And yet, here, in Lafayette, there is a thunderous silence. Who speaks for the creator here? Who stands in the halls of government here on behalf of all of God's children? Consider an immediate illustration: a river front park, a major investment of money, a luxury, a plaything for people who can afford golf: created and funded instantaneously. I'm not opposed to that: I'm glad for it. But hold on

it a hole in the wall on 8th Street, enphamistically called the Food Stamp Office - staffed by people who are paid less than the groundskeeper will be paid at our park: with no funds for janitorial service, and an exposed furnace and water heater in the same space when little children play while waiting for their mother to buy stamps. Hold up two images - two creations of the body politic: the superb greens on the banks of the Wabash and a room full of old people, standing in line all day - because we don't have the money to buy 20 folding chairs.

Politicans get elected by doing what their constituents want done. And so they are not as responsible as we are. This community needs a prophet - a prophetic people of God - who dare to be his voice. The Orthodox Church of Russia is history's best example of a church that decided to play it safe: that never raised a voice against cruelty and oppression and hunger under the Czars. And so the people turned to revolution. In J. Irwin Miller's words: "If the churches should decide to play it safe, to remain silent in times when a prophet's voice is needed, then I fear for the church - and for all of us.

And so, -Peace and the Prophetic stance of the church. And I would rather call this concluding portion a time of sharing rather than a sermon. It was Phyllis McGinley, I believe, who said that she was "cursed with objectivity": that she was always able to understand and feel sympathy for both sides of an argument. That is my problem with peace. I confess to a divided house in my own spirit: I know my history well enough to understand the mistake Neville Chamberlain made in the name of peace at any price. I confess to sympathy for the people of S. E. Asia who do not want to live under communism; and to revulsion at the plight of the prisoners of war at the hands of the North Vietamese. I confess to anger because they invaded -openly this time, and seem in no mood to allow my country out of this thing gracefully.

I confess to a pastoral and priestly concern for you: for you did not come here to think about this topic: and few of you have been there, some men may go: some of you have sons there - and all of us know someone who died there. I care very much about that, and I don't want it to come out feeling as if it was a waste.

But, I confess that at the deepest level I am literally hounded by those little children who today will die in S. E. Asia. I am oppressed by them - because of another

image in my mind: a man standing outside a city wall: the capital of his nation:. standing there weeping - 33 years old - and saying - "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace . The same man who said earlier, "Blessed are the peacemakers" for they shall be called sons of God.

In confess that in my heart I know that the universal God and father of all men is weeping in his heaven because of what is happening in S. E. Asia. and that his will is for it to stop: now. I know that God's priority for his people is peace - even though I may not know what to do about it. I know that my church, in its confessions, says it this way: The Church, in its own life, is called to practice forgiveness of enemies and to commend to nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace." I believe that - and I wish we - at this time - had the courage to try it - because it has never been tried in all of history.

I confess to continuing support for my church when it addresses itself to peace - even when I do not agree with what it says. I confess to a deep desire that all of God's people hear the anger of the prophets he sends us, and they they be open to change and reorder priorities.

I confess to the continuing optimism of the prophet, and my conviction that the church must hold up to the world the dream of world peace. Malcolm Boyd, in a recent article, said that the vision is one of the fundamental reasons for the church - for without the vision,the people perish. That's why, Sunday after Sunday, we pray for peace - even while the bombs fall and the war escalates. Because here - in the Church of Jesus Christ we have custody of the vision of how things were created to be. and how they could be. That dream is dear to me - as a father of children who will inherit my world - and who will have children to inherit their world. But the dream is dear to me primarily becauee I call myself a Christian,and because a star shone one night long ago, and because a child was given who is the Prince of Peace.

What is the dream? I found it last week as I was studyig Isaiah 55. J. Elliot Corbett has taken portion of that chapter and paraphrased it in a book called The Prophets On Main Street. Let me share his words: and prophetic vision and my dream.

In that day the flowering dogwood shall stretch out its limbs,
as a many-armed waiter carrying a dozen bouquets as trays:
and the crepe myrtle shall send forth its blooms,
like circus candy on a stick;
and the weeping willow will arch her braches to the water's edge,
like a woman washing her long green hair in a flowing stream.
And all shall dwell in a land of beauty,
praising God for his wondrous gifts to the children of men
For a new age shall dawn,
and it shall not be called the Space Age,
or the Jet Age or the Atomic Age,
but the Age of Peace.
an age when men will beat their tanks into tractors
their rockets into mail-service missiles,
their atom bombs into power plants.
For this will be an age
when your builders will outstrip your destroyers,
where resources, once used for arms soon obsolete,
will pour into schools and cathedrals of healing,
into teachers' salaries and urgent medical research.
where talents wasted on war strategy
are redirected to the strategy of peace:
where young American are not sent out to police the world with force,
but to serve the world with talent and friendship,
not to train guerrillas or anti-guerrillas,
but to train teachers and farmers.
For I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.
Let the trumpets proclaim
that a generation has come of age!

Let the mountains and hills break forth in singing and all the trees of the field clap their hands!

For the spell of war-obsession has been broken, and the paranoid world has regained her senses.

The promsie of a new era

hangs like ripe fruit on the bowed-down tree:

a time when man may travel freely in any portion of the world,

his humanity his passport:

when broadcasts are unjammed and so are roads;

when nations are not inclined to hide their bombs,

but anxious to share their vaccines;

when scientists may freely trade their information and discoveries

and no government will circumscribe truth with political theory.

Let that age step forth with eagerness

as a bridegroom cometh from his chamber

with every man may speak his mind with=no knock on the door at midnight;

when religion may be taught to all who desire its benefits;

when no press release suffers prior censorship,

nor any peaceful assembly is disturbed by police:

when rich nations share compassionately with poor,

not out of fear, or threat, or contest,

when no land will be a law unto itself,

but all accept a common rule of justice;

when men are not joined only to their likeness,exclaiming

"He's a Mason!" or "He's a Catholic!"

"He's a Negro!" or "He's a Caucasian!"

"He's a Christian!" or "He's a Communist!

"He's an American!" or "He's a Russian!"

but rather shall they rejoice in the unity that makes them brothers

proclaiming: "He's my fellowman!"

That winsome new age shall awake when all men enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall build houses and inhabit them;

they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit;

they shall not plant and another eat...

They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity..

Before they call I will answer,

while they are yet speaking I will hear.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,

the lion shall eat straw like the ox...

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,

Says the Lord.

Father, we confess that it is not easy to be makers of peace. As we look for ways to keep the vision alive in our midst. Through Jesus Christ our lord Amen